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Modeling Black Literature: Behind the Screen with the Black Bibliography Project

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CHAPTER 16

Modeling Black Literature

Behind the Screen with the Black Bibliography Project

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The Black Bibliography Project (BBP) plans to produce a bibliographic database of printed works by Black writers from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries. With the support of the Beinecke Library and a grant from the Mellon Foundation, project co-PIs and codirectors Jacqueline Goldsby and Meredith McGill collaborated with a team of librarians from Yale to develop the data model for their database. Drawing on Beinecke's James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection to pull case studies, the team of librarians developed a Linked Data model for BBP in an instance of Wikibase and trained and supported a group of graduate student bibliographers in a pilot phase of data entry. This essay details our collaboration with the BBP codirectors and other contributing faculty as well as our training of the graduate student bibliographers. It also explores how a project conceived as a scholarly intervention additionally became an intervention in the historic inequalities and gaps in cataloging description and access.

Introduction

The Black Bibliography Project (BBP) was conceived by two scholars of Black American literature: Jacqueline Goldsby, professor of African American Studies and English at Yale University, and Meredith McGill, professor of English at Rutgers University–New

Brunswick.[1] Noting a dearth of bibliographic information about Black writers, Goldsby and McGill proposed a project to record that information digitally, taking advantage of a flexibility unavailable in print bibliographies and seizing an opportunity to rethink bibliographic form. Initial conversations with Beinecke Library led to a partnership between BBP and a team comprising a Beinecke curator, rare book catalogers, and metadata specialists. In collaboration with BBP leaders and participating faculty, the team developed a Linked Data descriptive model for BBP, built the model into an instance of Wikibase, and trained and supported graduate students in a pilot phase of data entry. This essay details the design and evolution of the project, from the development of the data model through the training and support of graduate student bibliographers in the project's pilot phase in 2019. We describe challenges and successes in developing and documenting a descriptive model, an iterative process that relied heavily on testing and feedback from project leaders and participants. The descriptive model melded the unique features of Black print culture, the research practices of literary scholarship, the precise methods of traditional bibliographic description, and the innovations offered by a Linked Data environment. By centering the needs of the materials, this collaborative work evolved into an interrogation, deconstruction, and reimagination of the structures of library cataloging.

Why Create the BBP?

Goldsby and McGill proposed the BBP when they had, through their own scholarly projects, identified a scarcity of bibliographic description about Black printed materials throughout the history of bibliography (they give a detailed account of the project's rationale and structure on the BBP website: https://blackbibliog.org). They set out to build the resource they wanted, one that would be useful not only to their own scholarship, but that might also be shared with other researchers and librarians. In conceiving of the project, they were also mindful that in the twenty-first century, a bibliography need not be a static list. Instead, having observed recent projects in quantitative analysis of literature and considering their own experience with innumerable web-based resources, they imagined building a dynamic database that could be searched, sorted, reordered, and organized visually. Given their desire for such a database for their own research purposes, they thought perhaps the information could be compiled in a wiki, formed by contributions from many users in the course of other projects. And building the project around user-contributed data seemed an opportunity to enlist as trainees advanced undergraduates and graduate students to test and learn the process of creating the data. Thus, the Black Bibliography Project had from its outset a key instruction and outreach component: the participation of trainees in creating the database itself. The creation of the resource might even serve as an educational opportunity for anyone interested in Black studies and its relationship to book history, material culture, digital humanities, or library studies.

Though numerous bibliographies of Black literature have been compiled since the turn of the twentieth century, many of these are limited in scope by format, genre, or period. The majority are enumerative rather than descriptive bibliographies, omitting extensive information about the material features of the objects listed.[2] Meanwhile, as Goldsby and

McGill have pointed out, the *Bibliography of American Literature* (*BAL*), a nine-volume, decades-in-the-making list of books by American authors from 1789 to 1930, seems capacious in scope, but excludes Black authors almost entirely: of *BAL*'s 281 authors, only one—Paul Laurence Dunbar—is Black.[3] As Leon Jackson has noted, Black literary studies has until recently not been especially interested in book history methodologies, and book history as a field has not been that interested in Black literature. Jackson writes,

> Neither has listened to, or understood, the other.... Scholars of slave culture and print culture have rarely shared agendas, nor have, more broadly, African American social, cultural, and literary historians and those within the community of book historians.[4]

Jackson goes some way toward explaining the blind spots for Black print in existing bibliographic resources, and he looks hopefully at a growing overlap between the two fields in the last decade. With this rising interest in bringing book history methodologies to Black print, Goldsby and McGill have argued, the time has come to redress deficiencies in bibliographic resources.

Evaluating and Envisioning

As they were conceiving the project, Goldsby and McGill approached Beinecke Library at Yale to gain perspective on what the project would entail. Home to the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection of African American Arts and Letters (JWJ Collection), whose expansive holdings include printed as well as archival materials covering the history of Black American writing, Beinecke also has a resident staff of rare book cataloging professionals, making the library a logical collaborator. The codirectors formed a plan to hold a pair of summit meetings, one focused on technical aspects of the project and one focused on the unique needs of the content. Beinecke would host the latter meeting, a portion of which would be devoted to physically examining selected books to determine their descriptive needs.

The initial think tank, held at Rutgers in the spring of 2017, began by exploring a variety of digital humanities and library projects in the field of Black studies, including Umbra Search at University of Minnesota Libraries, the Colored Conventions Project at University of Delaware, and a project to add catalog headings identifying Black authors, printers, publishers, and illustrators at the American Antiquarian Society's North American Imprints Program; other participants included several more librarians and digital humanists in academic departments, and a representative from Zotero, the reference management software.[5] Through these presentations, the BBP began considering some of the technical aspects a bibliographic database might require. The second think tank, held at Beinecke the following fall, continued the review of scholarship and comparable projects, including *African American Newspapers and Periodicals* and the Project on the History of Black Writing. To the initial mix of digital humanists and library representatives were added representatives from a larger selection of repositories with strong holdings in Black print, including the Amistad Research Center, the Library Company of Philadelphia,

the Special Collections Library at Fisk University, the Vivian Harsh Research Collection in the Chicago Public Library, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in the New York Public Library, and the Stuart A. Rose Library at Emory University. This summit included an examination and discussion of several case studies in Black print history, using physical materials pulled from the JWJ Collection. The group considered examples of literature published in books, both with single authors and anthologies, and periodicals, in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, reflecting features including material variants, illustrations, differing supplementary content, questions of anonymity and authorship, and varying contexts of publication.

Goldsby and McGill convened a community of literary scholars, librarians and archivists, and digital humanists (with many individuals answering to multiple of these labels) for both meetings. Bringing together individuals from different professional communities, with different experience and interests, yielded a unique cocktail of expertise. The group identified many points of divergence in their approaches to describing the material, as well as many mutually desired features not represented in traditional library cataloging. We began to distill some core premises to inform the project development. It was clear, first and foremost, that no software or infrastructure already existed to meet the parameters of the project. The assembly of scholars and librarians could be extremely expansive in imagining the scope of the project and the many needs it could serve in description, training, recruitment, critical discourse, and collection development. Thinkers from all fields recognized that data models rooted in traditional descriptive practices would tend to replicate existing racist, colonialist, classist, and sexist epistemological structures.[6] The BBP would need to challenge these modes of description not just in content, but by design. The project had the potential to serve as what Kim Gallon has described as a "technology of recovery," an "effort to bring forth the full humanity of marginalized peoples through the use of digital platforms and tools."[7] In addition to helping to surface and organize patterns in the material features of books, the group agreed that the database could be a powerful tool for bringing to light the social networks of publishing, readership, and authorship. These social relationships are essential not only to a complete understanding of Black print history, but also to challenging the traditional print bibliography's privileging of authorship as an organizing paradigm of literary canon formation. These early conversations made clear that that the BBP was attempting to fill a profoundly underserved space in both library resources and Black studies.

After the two think tank meetings, three areas of emphasis and overlapping avenues of inquiry emerged as the basis for an initial phase of the project:

- build a pilot version of the database with data drawn from in-person engagement with the materials
- maintain a consortium of libraries with extensive holdings of Black print
- use the project to train a new generation of scholars and librarians specializing in metadata, descriptive bibliography, and Black book history

It was an ambitious plan, but the energy and enthusiasm from these meetings were electric. Everyone saw the project's potential to contribute to scholarship, bibliography, and information pedagogy. Goldsby and McGill secured funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for a yearlong pilot, for which they would serve as co-PIs.

Systems and Scope

Tapped to design the initial data model, we at Beinecke assembled a team of specialists, including rare book catalogers Audrey Pearson and Brenna Bychowski, archivist/metadata coordinator Mark Custer, and the central Yale Library's discovery metadata librarian Tim Thompson. Melissa Barton, as a curator of the JWJ collection, served as the team's liaison to the project codirectors.[8] This combination of specialists brought together expertise in Black literature, cataloging and descriptive bibliography, and ontology design (i.e., the creation of models for describing information). The group, which became known as the Metadata Team, undertook an environmental scan of over 200 resources, including both publicly accessible and subscription-based web pages, guides, exhibits, and collections, with full text, scans, data sets, and more. Once again it was clear that the Black Bibliography Project's scope is situated in the space where traditional library cataloging and descriptive bibliography intersect with digital humanities' embrace of the Semantic Web in the twenty-first century. While many projects had created access to scans of a discrete set of archives or had built a data set, just to name two general examples, none had focused on aggregating descriptive metadata about materials at this scale.

Given the BBP's desired emphasis on relationships and the interconnectedness of individuals in the world of Black print culture, the team recognized that emerging standards developed in the Linked Open Data community had powerful potential to serve the project. Linked Open Data, at its heart, is about building relationships among data, relationships that a computer can learn from and interpret, allowing for richer interaction with and interpretation of data both within a single database such as the BBP and across the varied data that makes up the internet. This type of structured data would inherently be more complex to create, making it challenging for novice users to contribute, but it would yield powerful results, with compelling potential for scalability. Our interest in the possibilities of Linked Data ultimately informed the decision of what system to use for data modeling and eventual data entry.

The two systems we proposed for consideration were Omeka S and Wikibase. Omeka S is a newer version of the web publishing software that has integrated Linked Data functionality for its metadata creation interface. It had the benefits of a user-friendly data entry interface and a support system from others who had already adopted it at Yale, both of which were attractive as we considered the labor of setting up the system and training the project participants. Wikibase, the software that powers Wikidata, has a less-intuitive user interface, but much greater flexibility for building a data model from scratch, as well as for the ultimate interoperability of the data with other systems (see figure 16.1). Wikibase would require a significant amount of knowledge and labor to get set up and working, but it would provide the Metadata Team the ability to build the data model in a Linked Data system. Moreover, we were aware of numerous library projects exploring Wikibase at the same time, including the Linked Data for Production (LD4P) project, whose participation from Yale was led by two of the Metadata Team members. We were eager to pursue the potential of Wikibase to work with library systems and engage with the large knowledge community contributing to Wikidata. Planning the training for data

entry, we were mindful of the project's potential to give students working in Black Studies hands-on opportunities to learn about information and data management systems. So, even though we sacrificed some ease of usability, we also hoped that the graduate student trainees would benefit from being introduced to the universe of Wikidata.

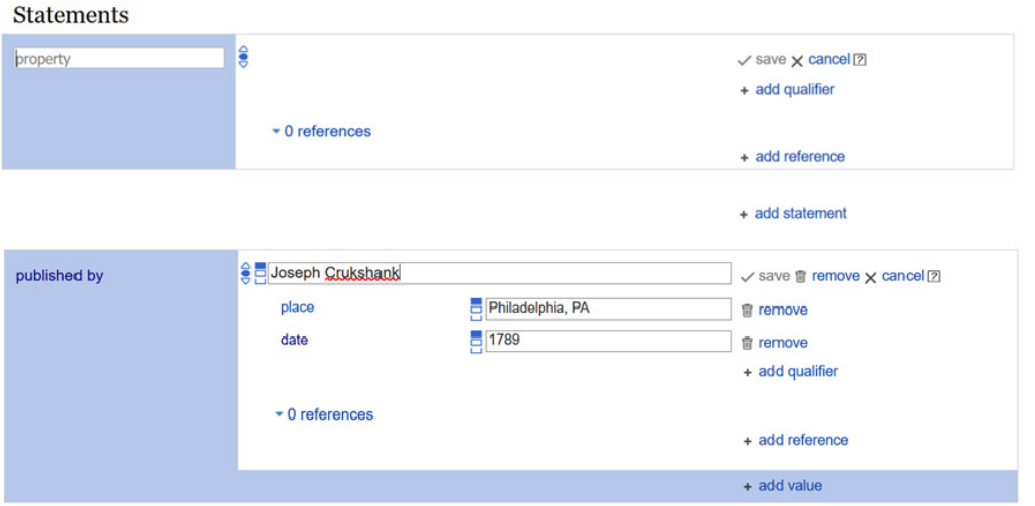

Figure 16.1
The data entry interface in the BBP instance of Wikibase

It was also necessary to finalize the material scope of the data model, at least for the initial pilot. To that end, the BBP leaders, alongside the Metadata Team and graduate students selected to work on the project,[9] convened a workshop session at Beinecke in the spring of 2018 to examine some of the case studies anew. In addition to refining the scope of the project, the meeting had the added benefit of introducing the students to some material features of the books, some for the first time, as well as introducing members of the Metadata Team to the graduate students we would eventually train. The overarching principle was to create a data model that reflected and encoded the values of the project, emphasizing and centering the relationships essential to understanding of Black print history and culture. The BBP proposed covering a broad swath of American book history, from the last days of the hand press period through the industrial book era and into the mass market. Moreover, Goldsby and McGill, along with project advisors John Ernest and Kinohi Nishikawa, emphasized the importance of numerous writings that fall outside the traditional literary category of belles lettres, but are essential to Black literary history. These include orature in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the narratives of the enslaved,[10] and sociological and political occasional literature, such as manifestoes from David Walker to Malcolm X. They wanted the project to capture the often ephemeral nature of Black print, whether in nineteenth century chapbooks and pamphlets or periodical literature. It was also clear that the project should reflect the repeated efforts to anthologize Black literature, an essential feature of the literary history of Black writing.

The Metadata Team, familiar with the struggles catalogers have with these very questions, was initially unsure how to create a model that would accommodate such diverse manifestations of print without reproducing the weaknesses of existing standards. One of the biggest challenges for the Metadata Team as we began to develop the data model was to think creatively and flexibly about description, rather than unquestioningly replicating the traditional practices of library cataloging and descriptive bibliography.

With difficulty, we ultimately decided that the first phase of the project would focus on single-author books and pamphlets and that we would address the questions of anthologies, periodicals, and unpublished orature at a later point. As noted above, anthologies and periodicals are especially important to the history of Black print culture, and their exclusion narrows the picture the database presents. However, these types of publications present complex descriptive challenges, namely, the logistics of describing the entire run of a periodical as well as the contents of any given issue, or describing the contents of an anthology. We had only a few months to develop and set up a data model for training, which compelled the codirectors, consultants, and Metadata Team to the consensus that the initial pilot should be narrower in scope. We also hoped that the data model we were building would be extensible, open to further expansion and refinement through feedback from the user community, or even open to refinement by the user community itself. In the end, the decision to limit the initial scope was to the benefit of the project; not only did the description of books provide more than enough fodder for training and discussion during our first workshop, but also several of the ensuing conversations and adjustments to the data model impacted the eventual discussion of anthologies and periodicals.

Modeling the Data

As the Metadata Team had begun working on the data model, we generated sample research questions from the project's previous conversations and solicited additional ones from the codirectors and consulting scholars. These questions would help us imagine the kind of data needed to provide answers and how best to encode the information so that computers could query the data effectively, leveraging the power of a digital bibliography over a physical list. Some of the sample questions were

- What pamphlets have Black poetry in them?
- How does book cover and dust jacket design evolve in Black print culture from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries?
- How many variants exist of this edition? What conditions of the publication history resulted in the creation of the variants? How are the variants distinguished from one another?
- In which cities were the writings of Black women published in the nineteenth century?

As we began to examine the questions, design the data model, and create preliminary documentation, we wrestled with the fundamental structure of the model: Would it follow the single-description approach of traditional catalogs and bibliographies or follow a multi-description approach modeled on new developments in library cataloging?

This discussion positioned our work within a period of transition in bibliographical description. When describing a book, library catalogs and print bibliographies have traditionally provided single descriptions or records that encompass all aspects of the edition and copies being represented. While these descriptions may reference each other, there is little actionable linkage between representations of similar items—say, the several editions of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Many bibliographies privilege first editions, but the literary scholars leading BBP have argued persuasively for the importance of identifying and following subsequent editions, reprints, and alternate appearances of texts.[11] A given catalog or bibliography might be able to pull materials together along a single axis, such as all works by Langston Hughes, or all books printed in the United States before 1800, but the drawing of any further connections is up to the patience, tenacity, and resources of the researcher. Additionally, library cataloging centers single authorship and is primarily designed to accommodate mainstream publication practices. It has been less flexible to collaborative endeavors (in works with multiple authors, a catalog record demands the choice of a primary author, and the recording of additional authors or creative collaborators is optional) and nontraditional publications, while considering the underlying networks and relationships among people to be out of scope. While the underlying informational structures of catalogs and bibliographies have not changed substantively in the last several decades, catalogers are actively questioning and reimagining systems and practices, creating a rich environment in which the Metadata Team could design the BBP model.

Eschewing the single-record approach described above, the core BBP data model breaks description into three levels: work, edition, and copy. *Work* represents the intellectual content independent of physical presentation; *edition* represents all copies of a resource printed at a given time from one setting of type without substantial change; and *copy* represents the specific item being described. The decision to dismantle description in this way, paradoxically, allows the database to bring materials together with greater ease. A work, once described, needs only a single record, which all editions can then link to, allowing all instantiations of a work over time to intellectually come together. Similarly, an edition needs only one description, which can then link to descriptions of all the recorded copies. Individual copies of works emerged as interesting to the project not only for variations among them, but also for their representation of social networks through inscriptions, bookplates, and other provenance evidence.

This descriptive structure, though a deviation from traditional descriptive bibliographic practice, is firmly in sync with current developments in, and the future practice of, rare book cataloging. The BBP data model is based on that presented in FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records); the same model also underpins BIBFRAME, a standard being developed and tested by the Library of Congress for cataloging using Linked Open Data.[12] As discussed above, the choice of system was strongly influenced by our interest in the possibilities of Linked Data. If the data model of work, edition, and copy maps the interconnected content of the materials described in the BBP, the Linked Data structure aims to trace the human and geographic networks in which these materials were created and circulated. The dynamic connections among the data within the database,

and to data elsewhere on the internet, gives the BBP a richness and power unavailable in print bibliographies. It also centers the social relationships essential for understanding Black print culture (see figure 16.2).

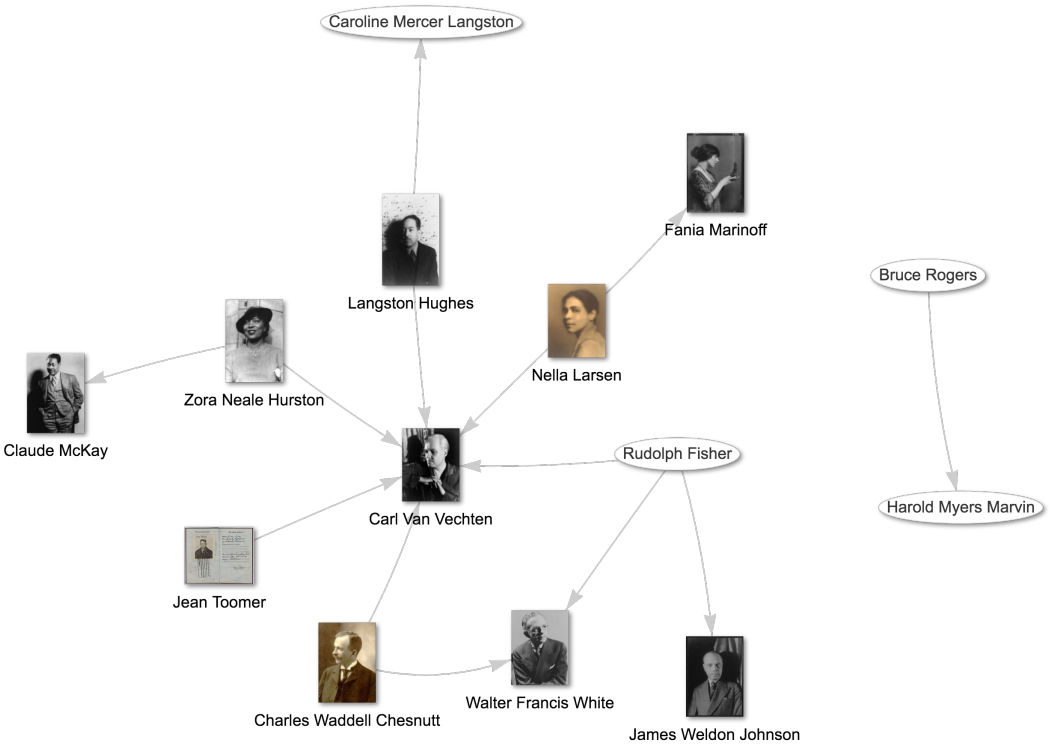

Figure 16.2
Visualization of personal relationships based on provenance information recorded in the BBP; Linked Data allows the query to bring photos in from Wikidata, without the BBP having to add the photos to its own instance.

Training and Redesign

In January of 2019, Goldsby and McGill convened a workshop to train a group of graduate students, along with project advisors Ernest and Nishikawa, in data entry in the BBP instance of Wikibase, which had been configured with the data model. The mornings featured framing talks on the history of African American literature by project faculty and extensive lectures on descriptive bibliography by Michael Winship, a renowned historian of American printing and publishing. The afternoons had training sessions planned and run by members of the Metadata Team, with hands-on practice using books from the JWJ Collection. All members of the Metadata Team were on hand to answer questions; get feedback from the participants on the data model, the process, and the supporting documentation; and even make minor adjustments to the data model in the moment

(some more substantial adjustments, discussed below, would need to be made after the weeklong workshop). We began by demonstrating the data entry using volumes Winship had discussed in the morning sessions, before having the students practice on contemporaneous volumes, first in pairs, and then individually. As we progressed in the week, the whole group realized that the paired work helped the students check each other's interpretations and their progress in the documentation; subsequently, when the students began to work in other repositories, Goldsby and McGill assigned them in pairs.

Critically engaging with the materiality of books was still a new experience for many of the graduate students. They had their own research in mind during the week, and not only did their interests highlight questions they wanted to answer, but the descriptive work also gave them new insight and inspired new questions for their personal research. By bringing their fresh perspectives to the study of book history, they were able to ask questions and make suggestions that, in turn, forced the Metadata Team to reevaluate our own assumptions and work. By getting feedback during the training, we were able to look at the examples that sparked questions in real time, while also having ongoing dialogue with participants throughout the week. This allowed us to better understand the challenges that arose for them and the ways in which the data model fell short of the needs and expectations of the project. Within the first few days, the students made several suggestions for improving their facility with data entry and refining the user experience of the Wikibase. For example, after the first two days we created a simplified checklist of data fields to complete, and we added functionality for navigating among various pages in the Wikibase. The enjoyment of the students as they engaged with and closely examined rare materials was palpable to the Metadata Team, but, perhaps more surprisingly, the students also gained satisfaction from completing the complex, multistep data entry.

We made several substantive changes in response to the feedback we received during the workshop. In addition to revising the documentation to clarify information and reorganizing it to better suit how participants were using it, we made two changes to the model itself: the description of dust jackets and the relationship of agents to the materials. The first of these responded to a descriptive gap the participants noticed when working with twentieth and twenty-first century materials. Discussing dust jackets, and how to best describe them, with the participants, in addition to eventually augmenting the model, also proved to be an instructional opportunity to illustrate to participants the physicality of books and how, sometimes, artifacts can be deceptive. Because dust jackets are fragile and ephemeral—and can be so easily separated from and moved among books—it is not always safe to assume that a book and the dust jacket on it were issued together. We addressed this in the data model by describing books and dust jackets separately, and then linking specific copies of books to the associated dust jacket.

The conversation about the various agents associated with books was especially fruitful for the project. The original model related all agents with any role in the content of the work (e.g., authors, editors, preface-writers, etc.) to materials as "contributors," with an additional description qualifying the specific relationship. The participants quickly recognized that this presented false equivalence among all contributions, which misrepresented and detracted from the Black creators of these materials. For example, the first version

of the model would present both the celebrated poet Phillis Wheatley, who was enslaved, and John Wheatley, her enslaver, as "contributors" of content to a volume that carries Phillis's poetry and a preface by John. This not only diminishes Phillis's creative power, agency, and hard-won authorship, it also falsely suggests John's joint ownership over Phillis's creative output, unjustly reinscribing his relationship to Phillis as her enslaver, as well as re-instantiating the original racist intent of his preface, to authenticate her work. In this respect, a decision at the level of data design was reproducing white supremacist structures. As Safiya Noble has argued, such data structures can be just as pernicious as the linguistic choices that are often the focus of critical cataloging.[13] The workshop participants clearly understood the implied message of the original data model; everyone agreed to a modification that more forcefully reflected and described Black agency. Not only did this dialogue improve the data model's ability to reflect the importance of relationships to Black literature and print history, but it also reaffirmed points the Metadata Team had made about the hidden assumptions, biases, and non-neutrality of descriptive models. Having the students and other participants engage in this dialogue presented an opportunity to teach and train users in the non-neutrality of cataloging, something Emily Drabinski has recognized is essential to overcoming the ideology that the catalog can be made neutral through corrections to the data alone.[14]

The codirectors and grad students had another opportunity to test the data model and documentation and to provide more suggestions in March 2019, when they spent a day working at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.[15] The Metadata Team, who were in New Haven, created a Slack channel for project participants and provided remote support, monitoring the channel in shifts during the day to answer questions as they arose. The continued feedback allowed the Metadata Team to further tweak and improve the model and documentation. Both the work at the Schomburg and the workshop in January were instrumental in providing the Metadata Team valuable assessment from the project participants, allowing us to improve the data model and its ability to meet the needs and achieve the goals of the project.

Throughout the spring, the Metadata Team not only made the changes brought up at the January workshop, but we also began to review the description already done in the database, looking for trends in mis-entered data. By identifying areas where mistakes were made consistently, we were able to pinpoint places where instructions could be improved and clarified.[16] Assessing the data particularly highlighted the tension in the project between wanting to broadly allow participants to create full, detailed descriptions in the database and the skills required to do such work accurately. The training that professional catalogers and bibliographers receive is substantial, and their expertise is built up through years of experience and practice.[17] The Metadata Team and the codirectors had several conversations about how best to balance the desire for rich descriptive data with the amount of training it would be possible to provide participants going forward.

Several of the lingering questions of the project—how to provide quality assurance of the data, how much to engage in the research sometimes necessary to identify the agents related to materials, whether to provide different amounts of description to eighteenth and nineteenth century materials versus twentieth century materials—are yet to be addressed

in further stages of the project. We were, however, able to make an initial effort at addressing periodicals and anthologies before the end of the pilot, and we made some headway toward determining how agents would be identified in the project data. In addition to indicating changes in periodicals over the period of their publication, the main challenge of describing periodicals, and also anthologies, is accounting for the content. The initial concern regarding these materials was that complete description on such a granular level would explode the scale of the project. In the wake of the workshop and subsequent revisions to the data model, a member of the Metadata Team devised a model for periodicals as well as a model for describing contents that could be applied to both periodicals and anthologies, giving participants the flexibility to record as much detail as they would like. The model was very briefly tested over the summer of 2019, but it will wait until the next phase of the project to get the same level of review as the main portion of the model. For the agents, our decision to use Wikibase was rewarded when we could capitalize on the landscape of Linked Open Data for queries and data visualizations. For agents who already had an identifier record in Wikidata or the Library of Congress Name Authority File—about 75 percent of the agent records created from the pilot—we were able to set up the BBP Wikibase to link to those existing records, enabling data visualizations like the one shown in figure 16.2 to draw on existing data in Wikidata to identify those individuals.

Final Thoughts and Takeaways

Over the months of the pilot, the students laid the groundwork for an important future reference source while learning valuable search and data mining skills that they were able to use in their own scholarship. Some of their findings were already presented to an enthusiastic audience at the BBP conference, held at Yale in November 2019.[18] The conference also highlighted an interest among scholars in metadata and its role and use in research. Rich relationships have always existed between librarians and literary scholars. However, researchers typically interact with public-facing librarians, and catalogers seldom get the chance to discuss their work with patrons or learn from them how the catalog could help them more effectively. By recognizing and capitalizing on the possibilities for interdisciplinary cross-pollination, the Black Bibliography Project created a fruitful environment for innovation, allowing us all to reimagine what was possible in our fields, to design a data model and database for research and description in the twenty-first century, and to bring it to life together. In the end, the project was not just the practical creation of a bibliography of Black literature, but also the joint work of researchers and librarians with both shared and complementary expertise to recognize and remedy a historical bias in our fields, while training the next generation of researchers in the skills and tools to continue that work into the future. By coming together to address this lacuna in bibliographic studies, professors and graduate students in African American studies and librarians were able to share in each other's knowledge and skills, creating a model for future cross-discipline library collaborations.

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Notes

1. For an account of the project's conception and rationale, see "About," Black Bibliography Project, https://blackbibliog.org/about/.

   Data model conceptualization: Jacqueline Goldsby, Meredith McGill, Melissa Barton, Brenna Bychowski, Mark Custer, Audrey Pearson, Tim Thompson
   Data model design: Melissa Barton, Brenna Bychowski, Mark Custer, Audrey Pearson, Tim Thompson
   Data entry workflow design: Melissa Barton, Brenna Bychowski, Mark Custer, Audrey Pearson, Tim Thompson
   Data model and data entry documentation: Brenna Bychowski, Audrey Pearson, Mark Custer, Tim Thompson
   SPARQL query design and data visualizations: Mark Custer, Tim Thompson
2. Bibliographies focused on Black literature are too numerous to list here, but early examples include those complied by Daniel Murray (1900), W. E. B. Du Bois (1901), and Arturo Alfonso Schomburg (1916) (updated by Dorothy Porter Wesley [1945]), as well as Porter Wesley's own compilation (1970). Several of these bibliographies' titles as "checklists" suggest their enumerative character; listings are usually brief and include only the most essential details, such as author, date, publisher, and place of publication. By contrast, descriptive bibliographies include additional physical information such as format, collation and/or pagination, binding information, measurements, a transcription of the title page, and notes about which copies were examined and the location of those copies.
3. Jacob Blanck, compiler, *Bibliography of American Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955–1991).
4. Leon Jackson, "The Talking Book and the Talking Book Historian: African American Cultures of Print—The State of the Discipline," *Book History* 13 (2010): 252.
5. For summaries, participants, and supporting materials for all of the BBP meetings, see: "Consortium," Black Bibliography Project, https://blackbibliog.org/consortium/.
6. Emily Drabinski, "Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction," *Library Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (2013): 94–111; Miriam Posner, "What's Next: The Radical, Unrealized Potential of Digital Humanities," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, ed. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 32–41.
7. Kim Gallon, "Making a Case for the Black Digital Humanities," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, ed. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 44.
8. Brenna Bychowski joined the staff of the Beinecke just after the fall 2017 think tank, immediately stepping into the library's work on BBP. Shortly after Bychowski joined, Todd Fell, who at that time was head of the Rare Book Cataloging Unit at Beinecke and had participated in the first year of conversations around the project, was called away by other responsibilities.
9. Thanks to Rutgers students Margarita Castroman, Gabrielle Everett, Alex Leslie, Ariel Martino, and Amadi Ozier and Yale students Phoenix Alexander, Kassidi Jones, Jeong Yeon Lee, and Sarah Robbins.
10. Narratives of the enslaved began to be more commonly treated as literature only with the rise of Black studies in the 1960s. Ironically, *BAL* includes descriptions of some narratives of the enslaved but lists them under the names of white authors who made other contributions to the volumes. *The Narrative*

of James Williams, An American Slave is listed under the *BAL* entry for John Greenleaf Whittier, who recorded the narrative, and was long thought to have had a hand in falsifying it; *BAL* suggests that the narrative has been misattributed to Whittier (volume 9, entry 21709). The narrative of Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, is listed under Lydia Maria Child, who provided a preface for the volume when it was published anonymously in 1861; *BAL* correctly credits Jacobs as the author (volume 2, entry 3192). While neither entry is inaccurate, both displace the emphasis of authorship on the "major" authors included in *BAL*. Repairing this emphasis lay at the heart of BBP's efforts.

11. Looking beyond book first editions is a going concern for both Goldsby and McGill, but see, for example, Goldsby's work on the very different circulation of three different editions of James Weldon Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, and McGill's on the circulation of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's poetry. While *BAL* does list notable reprints, these lists are not as exhaustive as the treatment of first editions.
12. IFLA Study Group on the Functional Requirements of Bibliographic Records, *Functional Requirements of Bibliographic Records: Final Report* (Munich, Germany: K. G. Saur, 1998), www.ifla.org/VII/s13/frbr/frbr.pdf.
13. Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 10. See also Drabinski, "Queering the Catalog."
14. Drabinski, "Queering the Catalog."
15. Cheryl Beredo, curator of the Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, made the group's visit to the Schomburg possible, paging volumes and offering advice while they worked.
16. Two areas have been identified for work in future stages of the project. One is to provide differing depths of description by identifying "core" elements that can be expanded with additional elements depending on the comfort of participants with the complexity of the data model and their expertise in descriptive bibliography. The Metadata Team also recommended the building of a new user interface that can provide data entry templates, which would dramatically improve the ease of applying the data model.
17. As an example, one of the challenges particularly identified by the Metadata Team was the creation of extent statements (which describe the pagination of a book) and the related question of whether to include signature or collation statements (which describe the physical composition of the sheets of a book). Both can be challenging to create, and yet both are traditional components of both cataloging rare books and descriptive bibliography. The instructions for creating extent statements used by rare book catalogers are over ten pages long, and the weeklong course on descriptive bibliography offered by Rare Book School almost entirely focuses on creating collation formulas. See RBMS Bibliographic Standards Committee, *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Books)* (Washington, DC: Cataloging Distribution Service, Library of Congress, 2011), 101–13.
18. This conference, "From Lists to Links: New Directions in Black Bibliography," was made possible by the generosity of the Mellon Foundation and cosponsored by Beinecke Library. For a copy of the program, see https://blackbibliog.org/from-lists-to-links-new-directions-in-black-bibliography/.

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